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Reviving the ‘Moments’: From Cultural Awareness and Cross-Cultural Mediation to Critical Intercultural Language Pedagogy

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In the field of modern language education, the discourse of intercultural communication has experienced three ‘moments’: *cultural awareness*, *cross-cultural mediation*, and *critical intercultural language pedagogy*. The first refers to the equation between culture and country. The second concerns the development of intercultural competence through acts of tolerance while the third aims to enable a more promising sense of agency within wider political contexts. Despite progression to the third ‘moment’, many intercultural theorists are sceptical of the shifting nature of this discourse. Drawing from cultural and intercultural theory, this paper challenges the first two ‘moments’ through discussion of the notions of ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983) and ‘communities of shared meanings’ (Shaules 2007). It argues in favour of critical intercultural language pedagogy by proposing that the latter be informed from the Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas 1984, 1989) where acquisition of knowledge depends on the meeting of the Self with the Other.

Keywords: intercultural communication; cultural awareness; cross-cultural mediation; critical intercultural language pedagogy; theory of communicative action

Introduction

Since the 1970s, the study of language-and-culture has evolved considerably in modern foreign language education and research. This evolution has had a profound impact on intercultural communication, for it has taken the discourse far beyond the narrow conception of culture-bound language to new ethics which not only suit the multicultural and transnational nature of our communities but also have the potential to improve our societies. Broadly speaking, this took place in three significant stages which I call the three ‘moments’ of intercultural communication in order to convey an impression of progression that brings to the fore different criteria and objectives to the study of language and culture. First, the *cultural awareness* ‘moment’ focuses on the

national language-national culture idea to explore central behavioural tendencies perceived to be demonstrated by the indigenous inhabitants of a particular country. Second, the *cross-cultural mediation* ‘moment’ refers to the notion of intercultural speaker which encourages language learners to both understand the Other and handle cases of miscommunication with flexibility and tolerance in the making of an ever-expanding cultural platform of shared knowledge. Third, the *critical intercultural language pedagogy* ‘moment’, which is still emerging, concentrates on questions of cultural identity by sensitising learners to the various limitations dominant ideologies bring to intercultural praxis within the context of education for cosmopolitan citizenship. Arguably though, the wide variety in methods, theories and policies makes these evolutionary ‘moments’ in some respects overlapping instead of mutually exclusive; suggesting that pedagogic practices which have marked each ‘moment’ never arrive, but continually take themselves beyond their own prescribed boundaries.

Nevertheless, while much language teaching and language teacher education transcend the one-nation-one-culture-one-language model by assuming complex, overlapping, shifting and often highly individualistic choices of identity and belonging, some intercultural theorists are still sceptical of new realities. My aim, in this paper, is to identify and establish a progressive connection between what is termed intercultural communication according to the three ‘moments’ and a critical pedagogic perspective which responds to the core question of what it means to live interculturally on the threshold of the twenty-first century. In doing so, the first part of this article deals with *cultural awareness* through discussion of the notion of ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson 1983) and the ways this can inform theories of the Self within the context of cultural relativity. Second, I concentrate on *cross-cultural mediation* with reference to the notion of ‘communities of shared meanings’ (Shaules

2007) which intercultural speakers are encouraged to construct through the dialogic process with their ‘significant others’ (Mead 1934). Third, I address *critical intercultural language pedagogy* by focusing on the variously complex repertoires of allegiance, identity and interest language learners need to develop in their process of becoming critical intercultural beings. In the light of this discussion, I call for more attention to be paid to developing critical intercultural language pedagogies by arguing in favour of the Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas 1984, 1989) where acquisition of knowledge depends on the meeting of the Self with the Other.

Before setting out to frame the development of the field in three ‘moments’, I wish to suggest that the discourse of intercultural communication aims to create and maintain universal conditions of mutual understanding – as does the Habermasian Theory of Communicative Action – without reducing itself to local and micro-local contexts of language learning. It intervenes in the transnational public arena of intercultural debate by challenging the very language learning pedagogic practices that are theoretically organised to improve cross-cultural encounters. Without offering images of might and right, it re-imagines the intercultural imaginary by showing how the speculative qualities of the ‘transcultured self’ (Monceri 2003) permeate, mediate and re-construct it. On a more specific level, the ‘transcultured self’ – one likely to transform the intercultural public sphere into a terrain of openness and humanity – is situated in the three ‘moments’ this paper discusses. These concern pedagogic practices evolving around extended periods of residence abroad which are obligatory for undergraduate learners of modern languages in British tertiary institutions.

The Cultural Awareness ‘Moment’: Equating Culture with Country

For almost two decades, intercultural theorists claimed that modern language education should provide learners with opportunities to familiarise themselves with the culture of a particular country or of a group of countries depending on the language taught (Byram 1989; Schaefer 1972). This was mainly achieved through the introduction of a pre-established canon of texts which presented a fixed set of bi-polar cultural dimensions (e.g. individualism versus collectivism, low versus high power distance) deemed to be shared by all the indigenous inhabitants of a particular nation-state. (1) This approach would enable students to understand the underlying values that guide certain behaviours while creating and maintaining a sympathetic approach towards other cultures and civilizations.

A number of researchers aligned with the presumably uniform nature of culture when used in the context of modern language education (FitzGerald 2003; Weaver 1993). Although some of them acknowledged variations or even contradictions within cultures, the traditional view described them as homogeneous and thus capable of unifying members of a specific nationality under a dominant representational paradigm. One such model that represented this view was proposed by Kramsch (1998). In her view,

(cultures) are predicated on the equivalence of one nation-one culture-one language, and on the expectation that a 'culture shock' may take place upon crossing national boundaries. In foreign language teaching a cross-cultural approach seeks ways to understand the Other at the other side of the border by learning his/her national language. (Kramsch 1998, 81)

The core of this approach entails the interface between language and culture by implicitly referring to linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences language learners need to develop in order to understand otherness. While these competences are fundamental for the establishment of successful intercultural encounters, there are questions arising from the static and monolithic construction of nation-states as totalising forms of comfortably situated cultural/social practices. These usually evolve

around the notion of 'imagined communities'. In fact, as Anderson (1983, 6) points out, it is the case that 'even the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them or even hear of them'. 'Imagined communities' also carry further implications with regard to the composition of nation-states. These refer to concepts of social group and self identity.

Although the concept of social group initially applied to sub-cultural categories, it was later recognised that social groups constitute any micro-society with specific 'conventions', 'recipes', 'scenarios', 'principles of action' and 'habits of speech and gesture' (Heimer 1997, 801). Individuals tend to become members of a social group depending on some distinctive characteristics they consider to share with other in-group members (Brown and Turner 1989; Holstein and Gubrium 2000; Hogg and Abrams 1995; Stets and Burke 2000; Turner and Bourhis 1996). So, categories such as 'us women' or 'we students' emerge (Turner 1999, 8).

In complex societies, however, individuals can belong to multiple groups at the same time, being these kinship, ethnic, religious, political, economic and recreational categories (Allen et al. 1983; Bar-Tal 1998). Proponents of this perspective therefore perceive multiple membership as an instrument which facilitates the on-going reformation of society. Abercrombie et al. (1992) share this perspective. In describing reformation, they refer to the paradigm of 'regime of signification' where social groups are initially labelled 'signifiers' whilst individuals are characterised 'referents'. 'Signifiers' are responsible for the 'referents' in terms of upbringing, formation of identity and shaping of opinions and beliefs. As such, individuals who are perceived to belong to the same community commonly share similar unwritten rules of conduct, norms and values that affect their personalities. However, 'referents' do not live isolated in their own communities. Instead, they

continuously come into contact with individuals from other communities who possess their own reason-modelled convictions and principles of action. Continuous contact with the Other implies that 'referents' develop multiple identities which not only impact on the ways they perceive the world surrounding them but also affect their own communities. Subsequently, 'signifiers' become unclearly defined reflexive and trajectory projects composed of an amalgam of heterogeneous characteristics brought together by the dialogic process. This process assists cultural innovation and change in that it allows the exchange of positions between 'signifier' and 'referent'. Under these circumstances, agents are personalised as they are no longer recognised as 'objects-as-known' but rather as 'subjects-as-knowers' (Monceri 2005).

Interpreters of this paradigm point out that there are indeed threats bound to jeopardise the subjectified imagery of the Self (Elliott 2008; Sarup 1996). One such threat is established by media advertising which promotes narcissistic obsessions with appearance and style while claiming that it legislates for a privileged form of social practice in the making of the 'good society' (Crook 1990). Yet, it creates and maintains the possibilities according to which individuals and societies become replicas of others as realised by the notion of 'simulacrum' (Baudrillard 1983; Callinicos 1990; Norris 1990). Although possibilities of replication cannot be dismissed out of hand, Althusser (1969/2000) argues that the dispersed image of the Self overpowers any artificially imposed 'selves'. Thus, it regains its strength through the 'ideological state apparatus' which while attempting to regulate subjects, simultaneously provides the very conditions for their emancipation. Hall (1996) clearly aligns himself with this 'school' when focusing on the play of power and exclusion within which identities are constructed. In his thesis, he identifies the variously complex 'enunciative strategies' which produce 'the marking of difference

and exclusion' rather than 'the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted unity' (1996, 4). It seems reasonable, therefore, to suggest that the Self remains 'permanently impermanent', 'completely incomplete', 'definitely indefinite' and 'authentically inauthentic' (Bauman 2005, 33).

Given the dynamic, fragmented and fractured nature of social group and self identity, national group labels can no longer determine cultural manifestations. Consequently, there is a need of a much broader understanding of the notion of culture analogous to the range of differing, infinite or even contradicting characteristics stemming from the differentiated expressions of the Self. Intercultural theorists have addressed some of the problems emerging out of the apparent uniformity of cultures by integrating their understanding into a model of intercultural communication (Dlaska 2000; Rathje 2007). Phipps and Gonzalez (2004), for example, problematised the pre-established canon of texts to which modern language learners were introduced. Their argument centred on the inconsistencies and contradictions between the knowledge these texts represented and the behaviours of the subject matter. The application of timeless and universal values to all encounters, irrespective of their simplicity or complexity, did little therefore to promote successful intercultural interactions. In the light of these critiques, language-and-culture pedagogy experienced a paradigm shift which primarily viewed intercultural communication as a discourse of tolerance and flexibility established by the cross-cultural process of mediation. However, within the context of education for cosmopolitan citizenship, the concept of national character still remains strong in order to counter anti-democratic expressions aiming to harness and create a new global political entity with a set of shared goals, customs and values.

The Cross-Cultural Mediation ‘Moment’: Intercultural Communication as a Discourse of Tolerance and Flexibility

In contrast with the mono-causal cultural manifestations of the nation-state, intercultural communication, as a discourse of tolerance and flexibility, places greater emphasis on the subjectified nature of culture. This is perceived as an ever-expanding product of actions performed by conscious individuals in response to their social environment. Here, human relationships take precedence over ethnocentricity and realise themselves during the process of interaction. The process of interaction facilitates a reciprocal relationship where both the Self and the Other appreciate and rationalise their deeper needs and wishes while allowing for the emergence of a ‘community of shared meanings’ (Shaules 2007). This community enables individuals to relocate and reform their diverse identities by accommodating the decisive factors according to which tolerance and flexibility can be achieved. These factors eliminate the notional distinction of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ while highlighting the need to harmoniously live together (Caldas and Caron-Caldas 1999; Savignon and Sysoyev 2002; Shohamy 2006; Starkey 2007).

One often-cited approach on which intercultural communication, as a discourse of tolerance and flexibility, is grounded has been offered by Byram (1997).

Deardorff (2006) summarises it as follows:

Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or interact; valuing others’ values, beliefs and behaviours; and relativising one’s self. Linguistic competence plays a key role. (Deardorff 2006; 237)

This approach demonstrates the founding parameters on which tolerance and flexibility are based as it makes references to values, viewpoint strategies and forms of knowledge language learners need to develop in the making of a community of shared meanings. While these forms of knowledge stem from an increased understanding of one’s sense of Self and that of the Other, they are constantly put into

question during the process of mediation. This process, which initially swings from one reason-modelled conviction to the other, provisionally settles in a relativised context where the intercultural narrative is realised. As Byram and Zarate (1997, 11) argue, this context enables ‘the transit of cultural property and symbolic values’.

Byram’s (1997) approach to intercultural communication has indeed offered greater insights into the study of language and culture. In British tertiary education, these have been mainly evident in the construction of intercultural pedagogies for the Year Abroad; where language learners are encouraged to become ethnographers in order to develop the analytical and conceptual tools with which they will be able to understand how different facets of culture work (Kelly 2005; Roberts et al. 2001). (2) The ethnographic method initially expects students to locate their informants while formulating a broad ethnographic question, known as the ‘foreshadowed problem’ (Jordan 1997). Learners respond to the foreshadowed problem by coming into immediate contact with the Other through a series of participant observations. These observations, which are documented in the observer’s diary, are re-visited continuously with reference to new findings emerging out of ethnographic interviews, informal conversations or even unanticipated encounters (Jackson 2006; Monaghan and Just 2000). These constitute the principles according to which observers re-analyse their initial observations as well as the basis on which they critically evaluate their own reactions and interpretations of social practices (Finney 1997; Gullick 1997). Ethnography must then be seen as a method which aims to enable students to recognise and tolerate difference by negotiating their culturally diverse identities with a view to creating and maintaining a community of shared meanings.

The ethnographic method has been subject to a number of accusations suggesting that it does not always succeed in reinstating the possibilities of being and

becoming for sojourners. Critics point out that everyday encounters are inherently unpredictable and thus can trigger feelings of resentment emerging out of subtle differences which are enlarged in the magnifying glass of perception (Alred and Byram 2006; Ayano 2006; Hammer et al. 2003; Pearson-Evans 2006). Although these can be negotiated during the process of mediation, there are examples which constitute a relatively unbridgeable chasm. O'Regan and MacDonald (2007, 270) describe these examples as totalising discourses put forward by 'neo-conservatives', 'traditionalist religious groups', 'female circumcisionists' and 'anti-abortionists' whose interests not only come into conflict with intercultural communication but also bring arising questions to intercultural praxis. These questions challenge the master-template of tolerance and flexibility in that they assume that the 'truer way' can only be reinforced when totalitarianism is subjugated or silenced by force if a presumably intercultural truth is to prevail. While these questions endanger the legitimacy of the discourse of intercultural communication by rendering it equally hegemonic, in essence they offer a shifting ground of reference where intercultural responsibility can be exercised. This has called for a need to re-theorise intercultural communication from a more critical perspective where the 'politics of voice and difference' (Giroux 1992, 204) become more central to communication pedagogy and identity. Nevertheless, within this more promising approach language and culture pedagogy is not exclusively related to ethics of responsibility as it would run the risk of establishing conditions according to which individuals would assess the behaviour, the belongings, the achievements and the character of others on the basis of their own norms and life experiences.

The Critical Intercultural Language Pedagogy ‘Moment’: Exercising Intercultural Responsibility

In modern foreign language education, the politics of voice and difference have awakened a great deal of interest stimulated by the recent collection of essays authored by Michael Byram (2008). This collection of essays inspires us to reconsider the purposes of language learning in the context of intercultural citizenship education as conceptualised by the Council of Europe. While tolerance and flexibility remain unaltered expressions of intercultural communication, the common core in civil society communication is challenged with reference to diverse pedagogical practices which encourage language learners to think of themselves as ‘critical citizens of the world’ instead of cohabitants of a specific community of shared meanings (Byram 2006, 116, 2008, 36).

In explaining this agenda, Guilherme (2002) states that:

It can be defined as a reflective, exploratory, dialogic and active stance towards cultural knowledge and life that allows for dissonance, contradiction and conflict as well as consensus, concurrence, and transformation. It is a cognitive and emotional endeavour that aims at individual and collective emancipation, social justice, and political commitment. (Guilherme 2002, 219; original emphasis)

The model of critical citizenship education Guilherme (2002) describes represents newer and perhaps more promising ways according to which we can re-theorise the discourse of intercultural communication. Although it does not explicitly question communities of shared meanings in the sense that they can no longer provide a ‘safely imagined shelter of security and confidence’ (Bauman 2009, 10), the dominant idea is one that critical citizenship permeates all forms of identification, collectivity and individualisation in that it offers the liberating conditions according to which critical reason is exercised. Thus, it not only invites language learners to make problematic what was perceived as unproblematic in the process of Self discovery, but also

motivates them to raise their objections to hypostatized powers during their everyday interactions with the Other.

A number of scholars have so far discussed concepts of critical citizenship by contributing to the increasing necessity of the debate surrounding the yearning for freedom and justice. From a post-modern perspective, Bauman (1992), for example, challenges subjectivity. He argues that although individuals may disagree to other ways of being, they may choose to demonstrate a flexible posture as a means of proving their generosity instead of providing for a culture rooted in human rights. To address human rights, other authors emphasise the necessity to counter the asymmetries of power between individual and groups stemming from social power abuse (Giroux 2006). While these points of view do extend the scope of critical citizenship, they appear to take no or limited account of antagonistic forces which make the very dimensions of our truth. On this argument, Freire (1970, 30) – in a book preceding these two frames of reference – suggested that the defining features of citizenship participation in community life should not be restricted in the provision of ample spaces within which ‘cultures of silence’ will be able to more effectively define and realise their needs. Instead, they should be extended to the creation and maintenance of conditions which will aim to release the oppressors from the state of the dominator. These conditions can be best realised in democratic societies where egalitarian forms of citizenship do not introduce entry standards according to which individuals are offered access to a specific community. Rather, they establish interdependent relationships of solidarity where the oppressed host their oppressors in the belief that the Self cannot exist without the Other.

This conceptualisation of ‘solidarity and hosting’, as used by Freire (1970, 30), is derived from Hegel’s account of dialectics in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

(1807/1977), which reflect the tensions of unity and difference between two imaginary characters: the master and the slave. Here, master and slave assert themselves, in the first instance, against the truest knowledge they believe to possess about each other. Hegel (1807/1977, 60) gives this the name *sense-certainty*, a term for how both master and slave assume to be aware of one another's identities. But having seemingly affirmed themselves, they find that their knowledge has no substantial meaning as it falls short of providing a sufficient explanation for their situational temperaments. For Hegel, the situational temperaments of both master and slave are signified by an allegorical question – 'What is Now?'. Depending on the time it is asked, this question provokes alternative responses including 'Now is Night' or 'Now is Noon' (p. 61). Identities, therefore, cannot be static. In this respect, master and slave are invited to perceive each other as an instance of their immediacy instead of a fixed entity. This leads both of them to realise that they can no longer control each other. Thus, they engage in a struggle to death following which the slave finally surrenders.

On many accounts, the Hegelian master-slave dialectic has been the subject of dispute. Weiss (1974), for example, points out that neither master nor slave achieve their full dynamic potential as the slave's submission drives 'sense-certainty' back to the master without allowing any possibilities for cultural transfer. For Kain (2005, 39), however, this is impossible given that the master spares the loser's life by enslaving him while unintentionally providing for the crucial beginning to 'self-consciousness'. This is best realised in their dialogic engagement during which the slave's power gradually balances that of the master. When the slave develops all the skills necessary to satisfy the needs of the master, the master becomes weak and impoverished due to his lack of autonomy for survival. For Hegel (1807/1977), this

equation is not a result of power the slave exercises on the master. Instead, it is an outcome of co-operation where the master depends on the slave for his services whilst the slave respects the master for reinforcing the suppressive conditions which brought about skilled craftsmanship. Under these circumstances, the master is no longer recognised as dominator but rather as another craftsman who contributes to the slave's emancipation.

Although this cultural vision sits in ambiguous spaces, it has been frequently invoked by both cultural and intercultural theorists who have attempted to bridge the gap between social reality and radical democracy (Dewey 1916; Freire 1970; Guilherme 2002; Phipps and Guilherme 2003; Singh and Doherty 2004; Thurlow 2004). Their critical pedagogical works have mainly focused on the micro-cosmos of the classroom which not only serves as a window to the world but also as a space that provides opportunities for human growth by unsettling traditional educational boundaries. Among them, one can distinguish those which invite teachers to 'progress beyond the status of the traditional cultural informant to that of the reflective practitioner' (Singh and Doherty 2004, 37). To achieve this, Toyosaki (2007) and Carr (2008) suggest that teachers should strip off their shabby, intellectual and conceited costumes by allowing their conscious spirits to walk side by side their academic bodies in a transcendental reality. Invoking Hooks (1994), Thurlow (2004, 215) characterises this attitude as the 'autobiographical imperative' where the private is disclosed into the public through a process of personal story-telling. This process departs from formalist and ritualised principles of education in that it encourages teachers to engage in self-revealing and self-critical displays of the human and the problematic by recounting their own experiences, needs, concerns and frustrations of their everyday lives as a starting point.

While this approach to teaching may be perceived as another form of pedagogical domination according to which teachers transmit their cultural property to passive, apathetic and speechless observers, the intercultural narrative reveals that language learners equally engage in self-exposing dialogic practices in the classroom (Diaz-Greenberg and Nevin 2004; Nainby et al. 2004; Turner 2004). These have been broadly captured in foreign language literature courses where the text is conceived as a ‘critical object’ which stimulates deconstructive interpretation and self discovery (O’Regan 2006, 191). In this perspective, MacDonald et al. (2009) suggest that intercultural readers express their differences, value judgements and culturally conditioned criteria as the literary text unfolds. Thus, they complete what the text necessarily leaves unsaid while mediating between a social and an imagined reality (Hoggart 1982). As reading is itself a form of social interaction, it demands interlocutors – ‘significant others’ (Mead 1934) – such as teachers and colleagues. Significant others contribute their interpretations of the literary text by debating their own discomforts, pains, civic struggles, rights, freedoms, memories or even pleasant encounters. Their contributions are indeed a valuable end to classroom discussion as they maximise the possibilities for the enactment of new identities and perhaps political agency due to be demonstrated outside educational settings. (3)

A central concern of citizenship education as practice for freedom is to enable learners to speak out their concerns when problems are initiated into the intercultural public sphere. This can be best realised when pedagogic practice is not restricted within the narrow confines of institutional contexts but rather extended to the multiple sites of everyday discourse (Giroux 1992). On this argument, Biesta and Lawy (2006, 65; see also Lawy and Biesta 2006) suggest that learners should not move through a pre-specified trajectory set by educational standards. Instead, they should experience

citizenship in an empirical sense – ‘citizenship-as-practice’ – in order to understand the ways their lives are implicated in a wider cultural, social, political and economic order. While this conceptualisation of pedagogic practice clearly shows how students can learn citizenship, it does not necessarily respond to unpredictable cross-cultural encounters and undefined incommensurable obstacles which may restrict language learners to syllogistic patterns of thought instead of dialogic engagements with the Other. Even when syllogism is perceived as an act of critical thinking during which subjects reflect and notionally oppose to injustice, human suffering and exploitation, it remains a partial response to public democratic culture if differences are not articulated in practice.

In moving beyond futility, it seems, therefore, reasonable to call for more attention to be paid to developing critical pedagogies without which syllogism can either be viewed as a force which implicitly affirms and authorises social and political domination or as one driven by fear. If the second assumption is indeed legitimate, then the discussion should focus on ways likely to enable learners to overcome their fears. To achieve this, I propose that critical pedagogies be informed from the Theory of Communicative Action (Habermas 1984, 1989) as it provides a broader life-world understanding of conflict management where the random aspects of everyday life intersect with a procedural pattern of communication.

In his Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas (1989, 113) draws our attention to the ‘life-world’, a transcendental site within which intersubjective consensus is to be attained. Here, ‘epistemic’, ‘practical’ and ‘affective’ subjects seem to satisfy a desire for a certain type of conversational fulfilment, that of providing each other with access to learning (Habermas 1987, 126). For Habermas (1995), this is achieved through the use of language which although offering linguistic structures

that are objective, does not limit interlocutors to certain conditions of possibility. Rather, it allows them to take a position towards criticisable validity claims, where they can verbalise their oppositions and correspondences, with a view to acquiring knowledge from each other. These claims are encapsulated in the idea of ‘a universal pragmatics’ which aims to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding (Habermas 1976/2002, 21). For Habermas (1984; see also O’Regan 2006), understanding is grounded upon three presuppositions articulated as follows:

- (1) That the statement is true (or that the existential presuppositions of the propositional content mentioned are in fact satisfied);
- (2) That the speech act is right with respect to the existing normative context (or that the normative context it is supposed to satisfy is itself legitimate);
- (3) That the manifest intention of the speaker is meant as it is expressed. (Habermas 1984, 99)

The three presuppositions Habermas (1984) puts forward appear to entail a background against which conversation fulfils its procedural nature and understanding is achieved. According to O’Regan (2006, 199), they can be glossed as ‘comprehensibility’ to suggest that the speaker is making an intelligible utterance; ‘truth’ to propose that the speaker conveys the truth; ‘truthfulness’ to indicate that the speaker intends to tell the truth; and ‘correctness’ to mean that the utterance employed to convey the truth is appropriate to the given context.

Although these presuppositions can be deemed unrealistic as interlocutors may not necessarily agree to a universal discourse ethics, for Habermas (1984) they mark a move towards knowledge in that they allow both speakers and hearers to critically comment on each others’ motives by considering the extent to which their statements are reliable. So, even when interactants express unreliable arguments, the very conventions of social being demand some degree of co-operation which make amends for many apparent insufficiencies in everyday talk. In this respect, Habermas (1976/2002) argues that conversation continues on the level of argumentative speech

where interlocutors seek further ways to persuade each other. At this stage, he proposes that speakers should not attempt to identify other claims meant to satisfy the wider argument. Instead, they should narrow the discussion to the problematic claim by supporting it with further examples, experiences and action consequences (Habermas 1984). Provided the problematic claim is vindicated, it will be acknowledged for its reliability. As a consequence, knowledge will be acquired by the participants on the basis of mutually shared subjectivity. However, it will again become open to critical discussion when speakers encounter other hearers with their own special domain of subjectivity.

The Theory of Communicative Action Habermas proposes is one which aims to enable mutual understanding through a process of discussion. This process does not pre-determine standards according to which social stratification and ordering are established. Instead, it eliminates social distinctions by allowing the Self and the often underappreciated Other to walk side by side in the belief that they cannot exist without one another. Its achievement lies upon the transcendent power of language and a commitment to truth out of which new dialogic and reflective experiences emerge for human beings. So, as the political system forces individuals into strategic patterns of action, language and truth transform the system into the life-world by sensitising political order to the needs of the informal public sphere through the articulation of criticisable validity claims. From a modern language perspective, Phipps and Gonzalez (2004, 71) define this transformational response as ‘linguaging’ where language learners are perceived as collaborative creators or intermediaries who attempt to reinstate the experiences of otherness while bridging the gap between different mediating points. As Giroux (2006, 175) notes, these, in turn, link ‘critique to hope, knowledge to passion and pedagogy to justice’.

On a more practical level, the Theory of Communicative Action can be applied in the language classroom to prepare students for future intercultural challenges perhaps by using critical incident scenarios. Although these have not accommodated critical intercultural language pedagogies thus far, they can be employed to instil humanistic values through the Habermasian procedural pattern of communication. In this case, participants can adopt the roles of imaginary characters by initiating a process of discussion during which they investigate seemingly mythical expressions of otherness and put each other in a problematic light. Problematisation can help them to analyse their own reactions in handling potentially unpleasant situations and the ways their own diverse identities affect such reactions. However, if we wish to provoke a response likely to transform intercultural consciousness, learning should not be limited to those aspects which separate ‘us’ from ‘them’ but rather focus on what is being unlearned in the course of this learning. For a theory of society, Habermas (1981/2003, 242) argues, ‘this possibility of unlearning has to be critical [...] to its own social setting, that is, it has to be open to self-criticism’. This suggests that images of the Self can never be fully grasped in their entirety. Instead, they always remain a work in progress, a work which is contextually situated in complex solidaric connections. To claim, therefore, complete knowledge, we not only isolate ourselves from the very act of knowing but also run the risk of reinforcing asymmetric relations of power and privilege critical intercultural language pedagogies have for so long been trying to defeat.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that within the field of modern foreign language education the discourse of intercultural communication has experienced three ‘moments’. While

acknowledging that these three ‘moments’ can overlap with each other in the sense that defining pedagogic practices extend prescribed boundaries, I have termed these progressive stages *cultural awareness*, *cross-cultural mediation*, and *critical intercultural language pedagogy*. The first refers to the equation between country and culture. The second concerns the making of communities of shared meanings through acts of flexibility and tolerance. The third aims to enable individual and collective emancipation by situating language learners within wider political contexts. While much language teaching and language teacher education reach beyond the narrow confines of both the nation-state and communities of shared meanings by responding to political inequalities, many intercultural theorists are still sceptical of this changeable scene. Their attitude, thus, reveals differing understanding and approaches to the study of language and culture which perhaps betray a problematic lack of clarity as to what it means to live interculturally on the threshold of the twenty-first century.

Prompted by antagonistic debates surrounding the discourse of intercultural communication, this paper adopted a critical stance towards the first two ‘moments’. It suggested that the nation-state is only one of the numerous cultural manifestations of identity and belonging by emphasising the ability of the agent to draw selectively from a range of discursive meanings. It also challenged communities of shared meanings for their supposedly common core in civil society communication while stressing the need to participate in many worlds without becoming part of them. In this context, it proposed that we read differences from a more critical inclusive apparatus capable of energising intercultural imagination by divorcing the reasonable and the unreasonable from their unquestioned familiarity. Crucially however, this principle of being and becoming does not immediately lead intercultural exchanges to

a positive outcome. It involves ‘dialectics of conflict’ (Beck 2006) during which language learners find themselves in the most challenging communicative situations underpinned by the equally dynamic and complex socio-cultural backgrounds of all discussants. For this reason, this paper argued that critical intercultural language pedagogies be informed from the Habermasian Theory of Communicative Action without which students are less likely to control their fears of the unknown when entering the intercultural public sphere. By applying the Habermasian procedural pattern of communication to real life encounters, students create and maintain possibilities of mutual understanding and agreement according to which shared ontological claims can be made. These not only provide for new existential foundations established through the dialogic process between the Self and the Other but also sustain the quest for knowledge and re-invention by means of reasoned debate and logical thinking. Considering the polemical disputes in which some intercultural theorists engage, it is understood that they may raise objections to the metaphysical complexity of Habermasian thought. By invoking Marcuse (1964, 251), I wish to respond to their concerns by stating that when ‘contrasted with the fantastic and insane aspects of its rationality, the realm of the irrational becomes the home of the really rational – of the ideas which may promote the art of life’.

Notes

- (1) Drawing on culture-pedagogical discussions, Risager (2007) concludes that within the ‘moment’ of cultural awareness most approaches to the teaching of language and culture typically centred on comparison methods. These usually present a list of facts to be cognitively consumed in the development of a culture knowledge base while claiming to exemplify differences between home and host culture. They can take the form of situation dialogues illustrating varied cultural orientations to time (chronemics), as one example. Learners are required to consider the ways by which the Other reacts to time while comparing reactions to those demonstrated by perceived representatives of their own national/cultural category.
- (2) Apart from the ethnographic method, approaches to the teaching of language and culture within the ‘moment’ of cross-cultural mediation also focus on critical incident scenarios designed to generate discussion in the language classroom. Jackson (2002) defines critical incident scenarios as narratives which illustrate a misunderstanding between two or more participants in conversation. Within the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*,

- Byram et al. (2009) encourage learners to reflect on their own critical incidents by considering one event they have had with someone from a different cultural background.
- (3) Where literary texts are not available, Starkey (2002) suggests that, in the context of critical intercultural language pedagogy, language teachers can also use authentic texts concerning human rights, liberal democracy, religion, political ideology etc. Drawing on one example from an Irish university, he illustrates how advanced learners of Spanish engaged with a newspaper article on the theme of immigration. Having familiarised themselves with the discourse mechanisms of racism, students critically analysed the ways by which dominance and inequality were reproduced and/or resisted by the linguistic and stylistic features of the text. Then, they wrote an account of their findings and their feelings about xenophobia and abuse of social power.

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